

Principles of Analytic-Empirical Sociology (AES)

(approved by member council on September, 25 2019)

The Academy of Sociology promotes an analytical-empirical sociology (AES) in research and teaching. AES is based on clearly and precisely-formulated theoretical statements that are confronted with empirical results obtained by controlled methods. AES principally relates to all aspects and areas of societal structures and processes. It uses all appropriate conceptual, theoretical and empirical approaches, methods and procedures. Through basic research, it contributes to a cumulative development of existing knowledge in the social sciences in general and can thus support scientifically founded evidence-based policies.

1. **Analytical-empirical sociology** (AES) has the mission of looking at societies and social processes in their entirety and not just at single aspects of them. Central to AES is analytical precision and theory-guided empirical research. AES follows standard scientific procedures, even though we acknowledge a fundamental difference to the natural sciences: Societal structures and processes are the result of interactively generated constructions by culturally shaped and purposeful acting subjects who may react to the findings of the social sciences themselves.

2. Following an **analytical approach** means that a configuration of social phenomena and relations that initially appears multi-layered, disordered, opaque and complex is conceptually divided into individual aspects that can then be logically categorized and ordered. This analytical approach requires abstraction from details in order to extract theoretical links. To establish an explanatory model, researchers have to link the integral parts of the phenomena following analytical criteria. Therefore, it is required to clearly define all terms and concepts, and to thoroughly specify the functional relations between them. Explanatory models can build on formalizing the proposed relations in mathematical models and simulations. **Empirical** means that the analytically distinct concepts and propositions are systematically confronted with empirical observations and that these empirical tests are, in principle, reproducible.

3. **Theories** are systems of interrelated constructs, concepts, assumptions and propositions. Theories have to contain at least one proposition about a systematic relation between concepts that is empirically testable. Theories transcend single cases. It is assumed that social actions that are embedded in a world of meanings and other socio-cultural processes can be characterized by such systematic relations as well. This also applies to societal processes and structures that are the result of social constructions.

4. The tasks of AES include the provision of valid and verifiable **descriptions** of the entire range of social structures and processes. The spectrum ranges from standardized, long-term social monitoring to detailed phenomenological reports on even very specific everyday micro-processes.

5. AES strives to systematically consider all possible theoretical, substantive, and empirical aspects that are relevant to solve the respective research problems. Therefore, AES continuously exchanges with neighboring disciplines. It aims to overcome the one-sidedness of the different approaches and paradigms and, if possible, integrate them into **comprehensive models**. AES assumes that cumulative developments and long-term advances in knowledge in the social sciences are possible., also in view of the often rapid changes, the novelty of social developments and the cultural relativity of certain assumptions and procedures.

6. Obviously, **normative beliefs** and conclusions belong to social reality. Thus, they are key issues of sociological research. Normative positions evidently impact the choice of research topics and the use of research results in politics and society. However, they must not influence the sociological analysis itself. Normative beliefs are irrelevant for the validity of sociological results. Researchers are responsible in their work to explicitly point to any potential bias that may result from conflict of interests. This by no means excludes reflection and analysis of consequences of practical and political applications.

7. With regard to epistemology, AES sees itself as an **empirically oriented science** ("Realwissenschaft") that assumes that the correspondence and convergence of scientific statements to reality and truth, forms a reasonable starting point for social science. AES is aware that empirical research can only approach truth, but that there is no justification for ultimate truth. This orientation is shared with various methodological approaches such as critical rationalism and philosophical pragmatism, which evaluate research findings in terms of their applicability in practice.

8. The analytical-empirical approach is open for **all fields and orientations of sociology**: for quantitative and qualitative research, for theories of action and structural theories, for descriptive and theory-testing research, as well as for normative-institutional, interpretative, or utilitarian approaches. The fundamental orientation of AES as described in this Statement of Principles forms a broadly defined, overarching frame of reference for the entire diversity of sociology.